



sense of a
city



PROSLAV

A project by Bulgarian Fund for Women, part of Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019



BULGARIAN
FUND
FOR
WOMEN



PLOVDIV
2019
European Capital of Culture

in partnership with



womenability



Introduction

Plovdiv, “the next place to be”

After Berlin and Lisbon, Plovdiv seems to be the new city where Europeans fly to find the perfect mixture of modern and ancient culture, unique architecture and culinary experience. Plovdiv will charm you with its amazing people strolling down its peaceful, yet lively streets at any time of the day or the night.

But if one wanders outside the city center, the urban environment changes rapidly. Accessible and lively central streets soon become large boulevards without any resting spaces or shade but with broken sidewalks, overflowing trash cans, streets without night-lights: places where women feel less comfortable and not as welcome in the public space as men.

Bulgarian Fund for Women, together with Womenability, decided to take matters into their own hands, and took the opportunity of Plovdiv 2019 to ensure that the city of tomorrow will respond to women’s needs and wishes, not only in the city center but also in its suburbs.

This participative analysis will serve as a guide and inspiration for the artists selected for Plovdiv 2019 to create art that will benefit the inhabitants of two of Plovdiv's suburbs, Proslav and Trakiya, and more particularly - women, children, elderly people and other vulnerable groups.

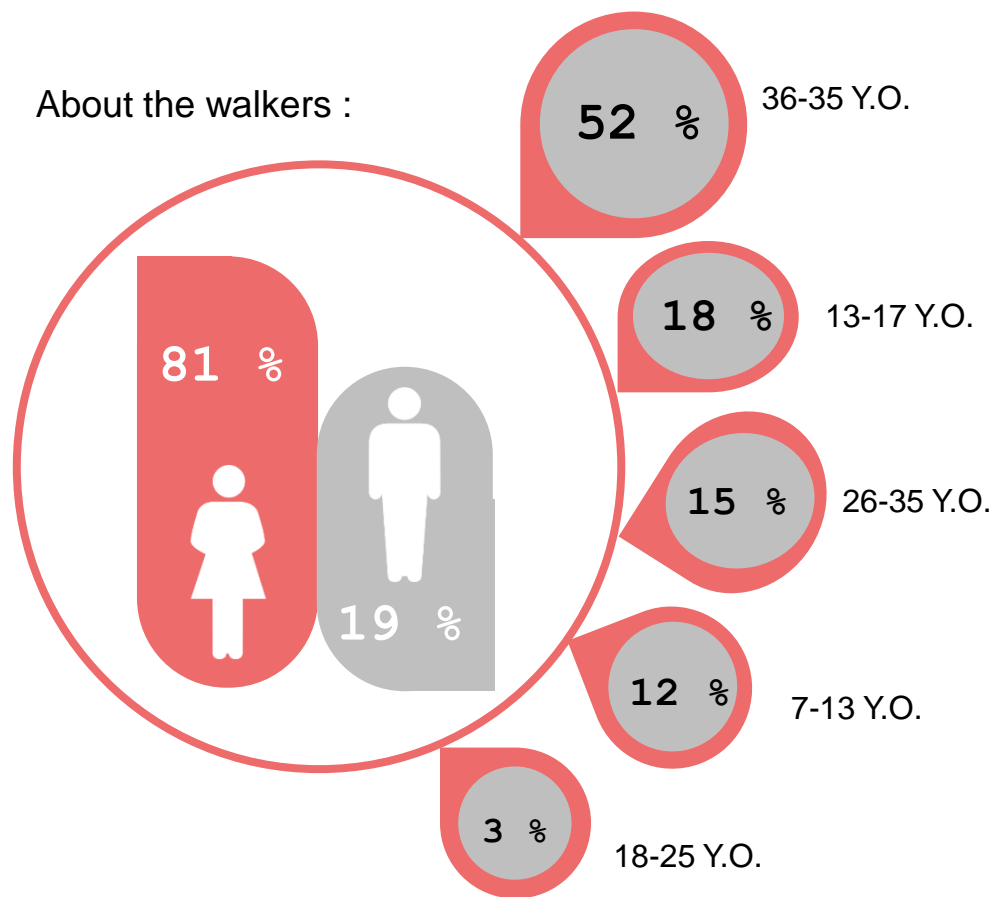
This first report focuses only on the area of Proslav, located in the South West of the city of Plovdiv and it is based on exploratory walks held in June 2018.

The walks and the report are a part of the Bulgarian Fund for Women’s project - “Sense of a City: an inclusive, safe and sustainable Plovdiv”, which is part of the program of Plovdiv – European Capital of culture 2019. Partners: Womenability, Gender Alternatives Foundation and Association “Consultancy Bureau Progress 7”.

About the walks

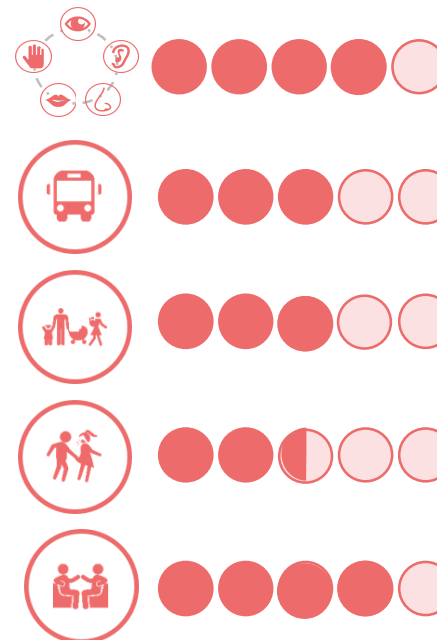
The 2 walks in Proslav were organized by the Bulgarian Fund for Women and the local partners: Gender Alternatives Foundation and Association "Consultancy Bureau Progress 7". The results from the exploratory walks in Proslav: 47 walkers and 35 fully filled questionnaires. One of the walks was open to women only. We stopped in different spots on the route to evaluate and give feedback.

About the walkers :



TOPIC EVALUATION

Participants gave a general evaluation on a scale from 1 to 5 of each topic . More detailed assessments are presented on the following pages.



Special thanks to all walkers and those who filled out the specialized questionnaires and made their contribution:



**These are the 3 main words used by participants to describe Plovdiv.*

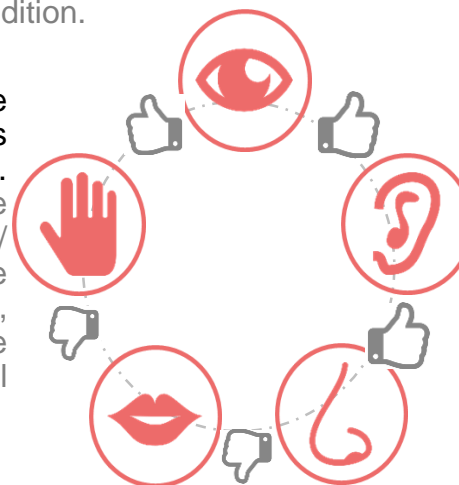


In the area of Proslav, Plovdiv



The walkers enjoy seeing the abundance of nature (green space, flowers, trees, gardens), animals (storks, cats) and active people in the streets (recreation area and playground). But they don't like to **see** the visible trash, broken sidewalks/roads, old buildings in poor condition.

They mostly like to **touch** flowers and cherry trees. But to many, the bad sidewalks / pavements are very dangerous, and they dislike walking on animal feces.



They enjoy the sound of birds, the quietness of nature and children's laughter. But don't like **hearing** construction work, traffic noise, people swearing and loud music at night.

They all enjoy the **taste** of free cherries in the street, fresh air and fresh coffee. But they do not like the cigarette smoke, the food at the canteen and street junk food.

They really like the **smell** of flowers, willow trees and barbecue. But they dislike the smell of open trash cans and air pollution in the streets.



MOBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION




Because women and men have different mobility habits, and therefore, different needs, we asked the participants in our walks how frequently they use the various modes of transportation and why they choose so. We also asked them what their wishes were in terms of mobility, so that officials can focus on improving the infrastructure to women's benefit.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS


- **Fix roads and sidewalks** pavements (add disability ramps)
- **Create bike lanes** (and bike racks)
- **Improve signalization** (better crosswalks, add maps)
- **Upgrade public transportation network** in the area (during the day and in the night)

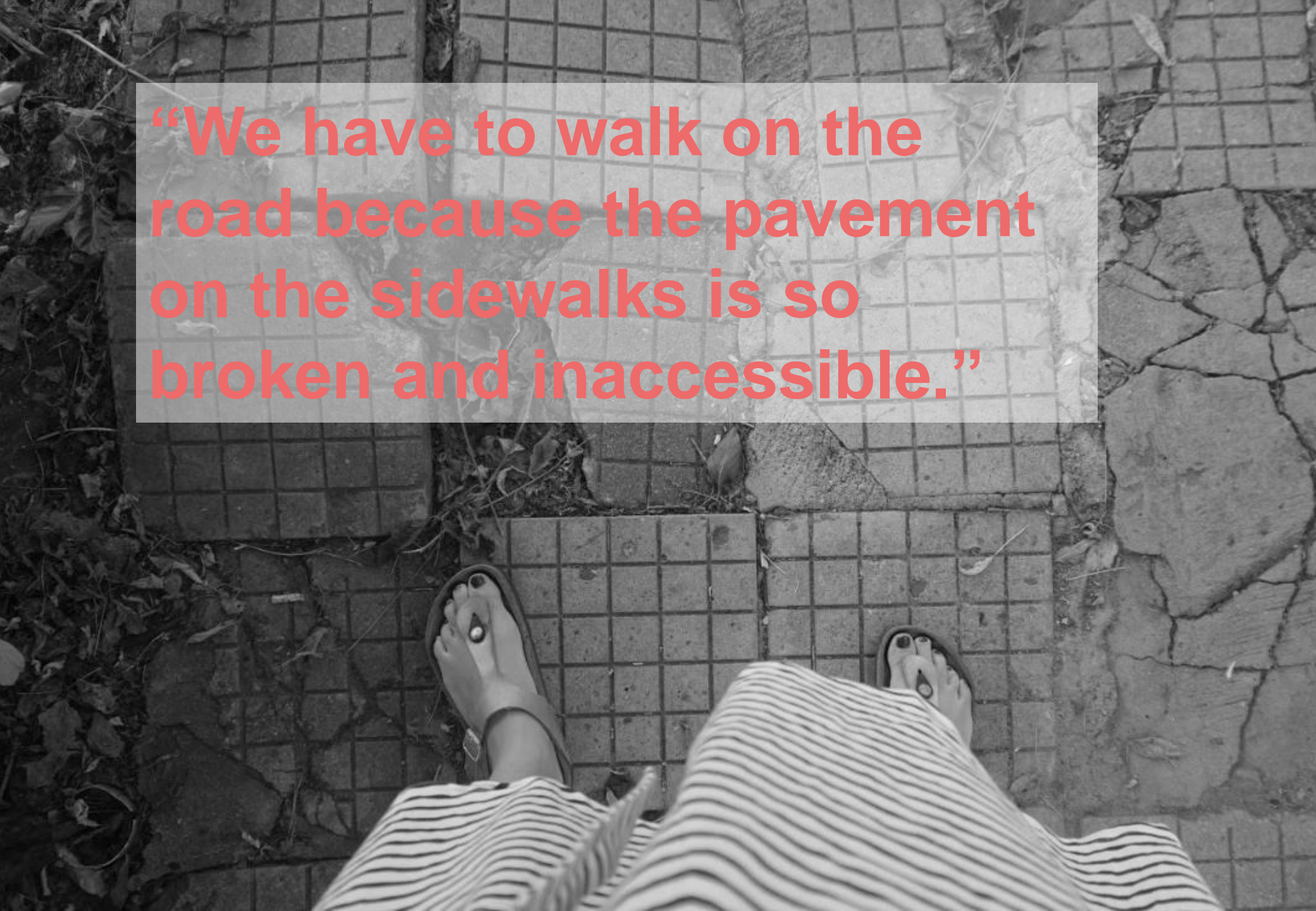


Frequency and wishes about travel modes

84% like their transportation shelters





“We have to walk on the road because the pavement on the sidewalks is so broken and inaccessible.”

About urban signs



80 % are NOT OK with the **ads** in the city,



70 % think there are no or not enough **street signs**. They say that street signs should be everywhere, and using Cyrillic.



63 % believe there are not enough **street lights**. Some residents want the lighting system to be in better condition



52 % of the respondents are not happy with the **maps** in their city. They say there are either no maps or the ones at bus stops are covered in graffiti.



60 % find that the **bicycle lanes** are brand new in some areas, but they want more of them!



60 % are happy with the provision of **street names** in the city; a piece of advice - to have translation available for tourists.



“

However, respondents noted that very few streets are named after women with the exception of **Maria Luiza, Olga Skobeleva, Marie Curie, and Rayna Knyaginina**



FAMILY AND LOVE



We believe that the more welcoming, attractive and inclusive the public space is to all, the safer women will be in it. This section focuses on women's everyday life experience in public space.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- **Add benches** (especially for elderly and pregnant/breastfeeding women)
- **Improve pavement** (especially for strollers, the elderly, women in heels...)
- **Offer free public toilets** in the city
- **Make the city more accessible** for disabled people and strollers (add ramps)
- **Teach** sexual orientation **tolerance**



With your family*



*Some respondents answered “Non Applicable” for these questions



70 % of respondents think that the city is not adapted to fit the needs of parents with children.. They note that because of the broken pavement it is hard to get around, especially with a stroller.



55 % believe there are no safe spaces for women to change children and / or to breastfeed. They say there are no such facilities in the city.



54 % believe that the environment is not good for old people, mainly because of the bad conditions to walk; it is unsafe for elderly people to go around with the uneven pavements.



“

It is difficult to get around because of neglected pavements and missing pedestrian crossings.

“

The public transport and subways are inaccessible to prams, the pavements are uneven, cars park on the sidewalks.



32 % of the respondents think the urban environment is favorable to pregnant women.



91 % are happy with the existing equipment for children but still believe there is a lack of open spaces and parks for children to play safely in. The few that exist aren't well-maintained, and more of them are needed.

“Decrepit playgrounds”



Love on the streets



92 %

of the respondents feel safe **holding hands** everywhere in public space, Some respondents explicitly mentioned that gay couples don't do it.



96 %

of the respondents explained that **kissing in public** is always possible, except for gay couples.



96 %

of the female respondents feel comfortable **wearing anything they want**, Some mention the difficulty to walk in heels and verbal harassment when wearing skirts or dresses.



58 %

think that access to **contraceptives** in the public space is available but only in pharmacies or supermarkets (not outside).



80 %

think it is possible to express your **sexual orientation**, but if you are straight, not if you are homosexual, as many people still disapprove of such relations and some people will be scandalized.

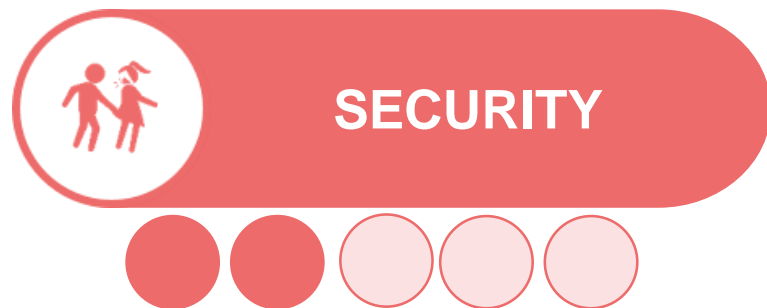


“

I don't feel safe when I wear skirts/dresses. I have been verbally harassed.

“

I wear anything I want, but sometimes at the price of ugly catcalling.



Security is the major issue faced by women in public space. Either out of experience or by feeling, it alters their perception and ownership of public space and their right to the streets. In this section we will see what makes women feel unsafe in public space and how we can improve it.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- **Increase police presence and street lights at night**
- **Increase awareness** among young men about what harassment is so that they don't exercise it
- **Strengthen communities' ties** so people are willing to help each other more



Street harassment

Frequency
legend



More than half of the women respondents are victims of oral harassment (whistles, catcalling, shouting, etc.) on a monthly basis. It mostly happens in the streets (by drivers) or in schools. Most women ignore it.



39 % of respondents say they have already witnessed violence towards homeless women in the streets.



45% say they have witnessed or experienced violence in public space or at school.



Physical harassment is annually part of 41% women's lives. It happens especially in crowded public transport: buses or trolleys.



33% have already been followed once in their life. It happens mostly while walking home or in public transportation.

Some of their worst experiences...

“

Five years ago a man attacked me on the train. I got scared, there was no one to help. I pushed him off.

While I was driving another driver pushed me outside the lane. I stopped at a gas station. He stopped too and got physically aggressive. Other people interfered.

”

“

A man groped my butt on public transport.

HELP

On average only 21% of women will be helped in a situation of aggressive behavior

74%

of the women respondents would report to the police if they are victims of harassment or assault on the street



ACTIVITIES



*How can women enjoy their city to the fullest?
How to be provided with access to sports,
nature, socializing spots, etc? How can the
authorities create a more attractive urban
public space for women to make the most of
their city?*

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

- Work towards a **cleaner city** (too much trash and animal feces)
- **Create outdoor sport facilities** adapted to women's needs (more focus on cardio or fitness)
- **Organize** more cultural events / activities
- Have more **artistic graffiti**
- Provide **free public toilets** in the area
- Initiate a contest for the most beautiful private garden



Enjoying your city



More art and events so we can gather together.



90 %

believe that there are enough **shops** in Proslav. But what they offer could be more diverse.



61 %

state there are good **art facilities** but mostly in the city center, not in Proslav.



53 %

are happy with the local **public services**, especially the local library and local hospital.



74 %

like to hang out in both their city and their neighborhood. They can find many **socializing spaces** in parks or in coffee shops.



81%

of the respondents like the availability of nature in their city, but feel that the **green spaces** should be better maintained.



64 %

believe there is enough access to **sport facilities** (but could be more). Some notice that the facilities are only for men and only focus on strength.



52%

of respondents believe that there is some kind of gender discrimination among street **workers**, as only women clean and men do construction work.



For a clean city



70 %

of the respondents think there are not enough **garbage cans** or that they are overflowing.



64 %

complain that stray **animals** are numerous in the city and that dog owners do not clean up after their dogs ("horror!").



91%


Do not like people **peeing** in public space. The participants explain this situation is due to the complete lack of public toilets in the area.



53%

Do not like the present **graffiti**, as they often promote homophobic or hate messages. People want to see more artistic graffiti in their area.



A black and white photograph showing a large, messy pile of trash and debris. In the foreground, there's a large, crumpled cardboard box. To its right, a pile of various items including plastic bags, sticks, and other unidentifiable waste is visible. The background consists of a brick wall with some visible mortar lines. The overall scene suggests a neglected area, possibly a back alley or a construction site cleanup area.

“The central regions are very clean but the suburbs are neglected.”

“There aren't enough trash cans and the available garbage cans are overflowing with trash.”

About men



56%

Believe there is gender discrimination in public space.

88%

Understand better how women feel in public space.

25%

Will modify their behavior after the walk.

Feedback

The respondents thought this was a very **nice** walk, they had a chance to meet new people in their area and felt good during the entire process. It enabled them to visit their own neighborhood, take a different look at familiar places and share their impressions with others. People suddenly paid attention to things they usually don't notice.

People also felt **useful**. They rediscovered many issues **and the need of improvement**. They appreciated the participatory approach to urban issues and infrastructures. People were proud to gain this knowledge and to do something to bring change.

“ Interesting,
Inspires non-standard
thoughts

“ The walk was very
exciting. It made me feel
like an explorer.

“ The walk was nice
overall. I was surprised
by the young men who
harassed the girls in
the group and were not
embarrassed by us.

“ It was an exciting
experiment. I met some
new people. We
outlined some issues
and ways to solve them.

“ It was nice. It presents a
feeling of mutual
empathy and the
possibility to contribute
to development.



Feedback

100% Of the respondents feel **HAPPY** and **PROUD** of Plovdiv 2019

They hope it will be an opportunity to:

- Have more cultural events
- Maintain/renovate the city
- Meet new and foreign people
- Include and further develop communities

94% Believe that arts can change the way we feel in the city

They believe that:

- Beautiful graffiti and live music can make a non-pleasant place more pleasant.
- One participant noted that having events/installations in the city peripheries (and not only in the center) is important. Many of the people from the neighborhoods do not visit the center and thus, do not have access to art.
- Plovdiv 2019 is an opportunity to promote inclusion and challenge stereotypes.

“It can change a person's point of view about something. The city becomes more colorful and that **makes people feel better.**

Yes, it enriches the city, attracts new people and we become more **empathetic** with life in the city. ”

Personal experiences in the city

Best experiences I had in the city:

- ☺ “Twelve years ago I had just given birth and was in the **park breastfeeding** my baby. An old lady approached me and congratulated me. It felt nice.”
- ☺ “A year ago my friends and I helped an old lady carry her grocery bags. She repaid us by treating us with some home made cookies and juice. It **felt good to help someone from the neighborhood** that needed it.”
- ☺ “Some time ago I went to a nearby garden with a friend of mine. It was very **nice and calm.**”
- ☺ “I was at a salsa festival, everyone was having fun. **I danced a lot.**”
- ☺ “A year ago there was a symphonic orchestra concert in the city garden. **Everyone was smiling.** I was happy.”
- ☺ “In the **Natural Science Museum** with my children when we were in the butterfly room. **I felt good.**”
- ☺ “At a concert, a popular artist and music band sang a patriotic song that **united everyone.** I felt happy, part of something larger than me.”
- ☺ “There were **fireworks** at last year’s 'Kapana' festival. I was impressed.”

What can WE do ?

What can women do?

Be **united** and active about women's issues. Raise **awareness** in public. Nurture **solidarity**. Participate in **community** events. **Educate** their children about equality and tolerance.



What can men do?

Be more **sensitive** and educated about women-related issues. Become **role models** for other men. **Educate** their children about gender-equality. Stop peeing in the streets. Let space for women expression. Spend more time with their family.



What can NGOs do?

Create more space for **citizens participation** and inclusion. Raise **awareness** and educate about gender equality. Create projects about community and city improvements. More lobbying and campaigns.



What can the government do?

Listen to what NGOs and communities have to say about the area. **Improve sidewalks** and roads. **Update** and exhibit clearly bus/train schedules



Womenability's Recommendation #1



Repairing broken pavement with art:

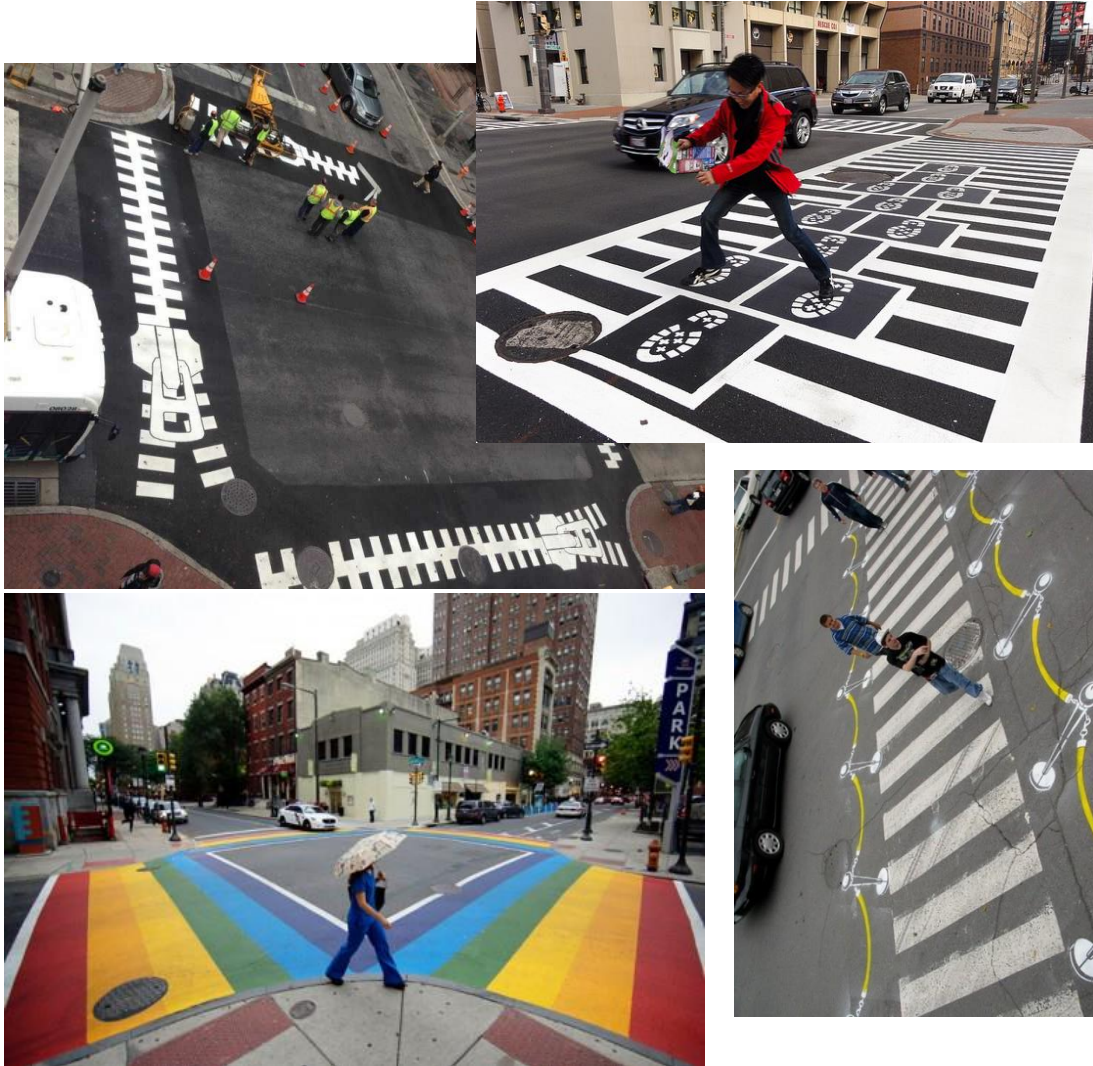
Severely broken sidewalks are dangerous for anyone walking in the streets. But even more dangerous for women wearing high heels, citizens with reduced mobility and the elderly. Let alone for parents trying to get somewhere by pushing their children in strollers!

Sometimes artists and communities take things into their own hands like in the case of Montevideo and Rosario, where broken sidewalks are numerous, and where it seems that it is not a priority for the municipality!

The solution they have applied is very simple: repair the sidewalk with your "home-made mosaics".

It can even become a community project where women and children create their own ceramics that will be exposed on the streets. A great way to engage and valorize the local community!

Womenability's Recommendation #2



Artistic crosswalks to protect pedestrians :

Many inhabitants of Proslav mentioned that the city lacks proper crosswalks, which makes many women feel unsafe walking with children, especially when having to cross the roads. Crosswalks can not only protect pedestrians but they can also be artistic expressions. Furthermore they can be tools to introduce LGBT tolerance in a neighborhood (many cities are painting crosswalks with LGBT+ colors to support LGBT+ communities).

It can also be done in cooperation with the communities to highlight a specific symbol or culture of the area.

Womenability's Recommendation #3



Artistic murals to end sexual harassment towards women in public space:

Street art can be a great tool to empower women and to educate men. NGOs and artists around the world are using murals to talk about sexual harassment towards women.

The SafetiPin social enterprise (in India) works with a group of women to find the appropriate message to write on the mural. The volunteers paint their message on a wall in the location where harassment has been experienced. Examples of messages written:

- >Reminding men that it is forbidden by the law to take pictures of women without their consent

- >Empowering women with strong messages, making men aware of what street harassment is and helping women to voice their discontent

In Proslav many young girls noted in the survey that they have been harassed around local schools: perhaps artists together with students could create murals around the schools in the neighborhood.



Womenability's Recommendation #4

Create fun public benches for everybody to enjoy:

Many respondents pointed to the fact that Proslav is lacking benches (especially for pregnant or breastfeeding women, and elderly people's needs). Benches create not only a more accessible public space, where people in need to rest can do so, but they also create “eyes on the street” - people are outside taking in their city and able (when possible) to interact or witness interactions.

“Bench-space allows people to loosely belong within the flow of city life, to see and be seen.” (youngfoundation.org)

Benches have a real artistic potential where design and utility intersect to create a unique social **urban artifact** that **can address public needs** like those of social interaction, inclusion and accessibility.

Also, it's not that difficult to create baby-friendly and breastfeeding-friendly benches.



Thank you for reading this report and acknowledging women's needs in Proslav!



Project team

